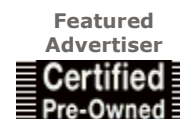




Addressing LI's Housing Needs



County execs outline plans

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Tackling affordable housing on the county level may be the best method to bring housing prices within reach of less wealthy Long Islanders, said incoming Suffolk County Executive Steve Levy and Nassau County Executive Thomas Suozzi yesterday.

The pair were speakers at the Long Island Housing Partnership Chairman's Symposium, where Levy told an audience at the Crest Hollow County Club in Woodbury that he would establish a Commission on Workforce Housing.

Speaking to a reporter after the event, Levy said that civic, building and community leaders would be a part of the commission, and that they would select areas appropriate for the construction of affordable housing.

"Smart growth would be the priority - taking old sites and redeveloping them, as opposed to developing virgin land," Levy said. He said once the sites were determined the group would approach the towns and seek zoning changes.

Levy called for waiving county fees tied to construction and expediting approvals from the county health and public works departments. Levy said that he was prepared to provide loans and down payment assistance on the county level.

"We are not lacking of ideas - just the will," Levy said.

In Nassau, Suozzi's 2004 budget includes funds to create the Nassau County Planning Federation to set goals on how best to create workforce housing, he said. Ideas include multi-unit developments, where homes generally cost less.

Meanwhile, Rep. Steve Israel (D-Huntington) told the audience that he was creating a "Homeland Security Workforce" bill that would see Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac partner with community organizations to provide affordable housing to employees of defense contractors.

The program would provide matching funds for employees who earn no more than 120 percent of the median income, according to a spokesman for Israel's office. This is much higher than the 80 percent of median income that the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban

Development uses to determine eligibility for matching funds in its affordable housing program.

Israel said he plans to introduce the bill next month.

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